

Marine Artillery in the Battle of An Nasiriyah

According to intelligence reports, An Nasiriyah, a city in south central Iraq, would present little military resistance to the Coalition Forces' rapid advance toward Baghdad. (See the map in Figure 1.) Instead, Regimental Combat Team-2 (RCT-2) encountered an extremely violent confrontation with an enemy force occupying complex urban terrain. What followed was a fiercely fought eight-day urban battle against a large concentration of paramilitary forces and remnants of the Iraqi 11th Infantry Division, both of whom were determined to exact a heavy toll of Coalition casualties and retain control of the city.

From the initial fire mission on the morning of 23 March to the final mission fired in support of Task Force 20's rescue of Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch, the Marine Artillery of 1st Battalion (Reinforced), 10th Marines

(1/10) provided RCT-2's only all-weather, long-range, continuous fire support. The battalion fired more than 2,100 rounds in this short period, enabling RCT-2 to seize and secure the eastern bridges of the city, thus opening a vital line of communications (LOCs) through which elements of the I Marine Expeditionary Force (IMEF) could continue the fight north to Baghdad.

This article provides a brief overview of the task organization, sequence of events and artillery specific-lessons identified by 1/10 from a battle that can be characterized as a military operation in urban terrain (MOUT).

By Major
Walker M. Field,
USMC



Overview. 1/10 deployed from Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to Kuwait in January 2003 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The battalion then deployed to Iraq in March in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). 1/10 was attached to RCT-2, 2d Marine Infantry Regiment.

RCT-2 was a reinforced motorized and mechanized infantry regiment consisting of two motorized medium tactical vehicle replacement (MTVR) infantry battalions, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines (2/8) and 3d Battalion, 2d Marines (3/2); one reinforced mechanized amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) infantry battalion, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines (1/2); a light armored reconnaissance (LAR) company; and a recon company. RCT-2's higher headquarters was the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2d MEB), designated Task Force Tarawa (TF Tarawa) upon arrival in Kuwait.

1/10 received the official deployment order on 31 December 2002 to deploy in support of OEF. The order directed the battalion's four batteries (Headquarters, A, B and C), a counterbattery radar detachment (CBR) with two Q-46A radars and a target processing center (TPC), and a heavy

engineer squad from the 10th Marine Artillery Regiment deploy with 1/10. Via amphibious ships, the battalion sailed for the Persian Gulf and arrived at Kuwait Naval Base on 15 February. The battalion immediately moved inland to Camp Shoup within Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) Coyote (I MEF's logistical support area, or LSA) and established its base of operations. From 20 February until 19 March, 1/10 focused on combat training and equipment maintenance.

The battalion deployed from Camp Shoup on the morning of 20 March for an assembly area along the northwestern border of Kuwait and Iraq, its final destination before starting offensive combat operations. The 1st Marine Division was on TF Tarawa's right flank while the 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized) (3d ID) was on the left.

On 21 March, 12 hours behind the lead elements of the 3d ID, RCT-2 crossed the border obstacle belt into Iraq. Following a route parallel but slightly east of the 3d ID's route, RCT-2 moved north toward the Al Luhays Oil Facility located south-east of Jalibah Airfield.

1/10 assumed a "desert wedge" formation consisting of three battery col-

umns abreast, each with an element of headquarters battery in trace. It moved behind 1/2 and in front of 3/2. TF Tarawa's mission was to occupy initial defensive positions to enable the 3d ID to clear through Jalibah Airfield.

The next morning, 1/10 continued north and occupied firing positions just north of Jalibah Airfield. That afternoon, the CBR detachment repeatedly detected counterfire targets originating from the same location. Gaining RCT-2 approval, the battalion engaged the target. As a result of 1/10's first fire mission in OIF, CBR received no further detections from that vicinity, and 42 Iraqi Regular Army soldiers surrendered to a nearby LAR unit.

That evening, after TF Tarawa consolidated at Jalibah, it was directed to conduct a relief in place of 3d ID forces in the vicinity of Tallil Airfield and the Highway 1 bridge across the Euphrates River west of Nasiriyah. TF Tarawa also issued orders to RCT-2 to move forces northwest toward Nasiriyah and be prepared to continue the attack to seize and secure the eastern bridges across the Euphrates River and the Saddam Canal within the city of An Nasiriyah.

Photo by Sgt Jose Guillen,
1st MarDiv PAO

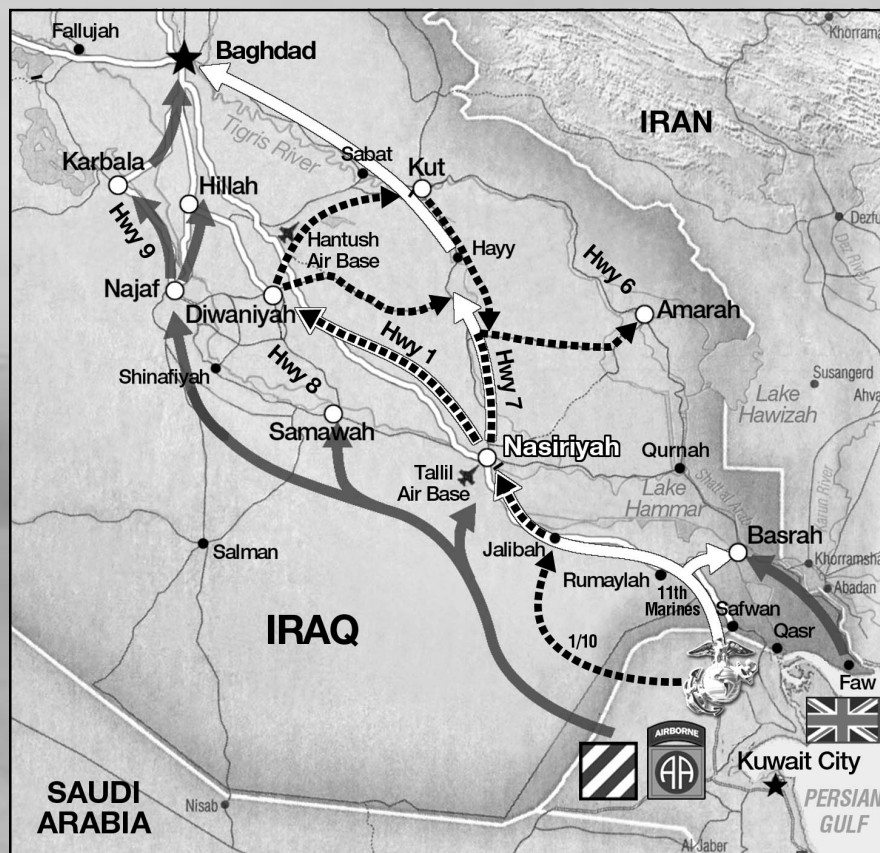


Figure 1: 1st Battalion, 10th Marines (1/10) in Operation Iraqi Freedom—The Battle of An Nasiriyah

Battle for An Nasiriyah: 23 March–2 April. On the morning of 23 March, 1/10 moved in trace of RCT-2's lead element (1/2) when it began receiving indirect and direct fire from covered positions to the east and west of Highway 7, the main road leading into southern Nasiriyah. 1/10 quickly emplaced in restricted terrain and began processing fire missions. Simultaneously, 1/10 provided medical aid to soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company who had been ambushed in the city and were moving south along Highway 7.

The battle continued throughout the day as 1/10's batteries bounded forward, firing a number of fire-for-effect (FFE) and adjust fire missions in support of infantry companies in contact. The battalion also continued to engage radar-generated targets, totaling five missions and firing 108 dual-purpose improved conventional munition (DPICM) rounds. While actively processing fire missions, Bravo Battery's main body received incoming mortar fire, forcing the battery to conduct an emergency displacement.

During the afternoon of 23 March, the battalion was reinforced with fires from India Battery, 3/10 (attached to 1/11). 1/11 was southeast of the city awaiting orders to either pass through RCT-2 in Nasiriyah or bypass the city to the west.

Dawn on 24 March found RCT-2 heavily engaged throughout Nasiriyah in urban combat operations. 1/10 displaced farther north within the outskirts of the city to achieve a greater range fan north of the Saddam Canal. Proficient azimuth of fire management was critical, as RCT-2's mechanized battalion (1/2) remained north of the city while the two motorized battalions (3/2 and 2/8) operated principally south of the city.

1/10 had to carefully position itself to balance its fire support. The battalion had to be close enough to the city to provide fires well north in support of 1/2, which was about 14 to 30 kilometers

from 1/10, but not too close to preclude its supporting the two motorized battalions operating in the southern portion of the city, about five kilometers north of 1/10.

As the fighting intensified, scores of the enemy and indigenous displaced personnel poured out of the city to the south. As a result, the battalion processed a number of enemy prisoners of war (EPWs) and redirected numerous displaced persons.

Although the two motorized battalions were less than five kilometers to the north, an industrial corridor where paramilitary forces could freely maneuver was within the noncontiguous battlespace. Thus, 1/10 was exposed to civilian and enemy foot and vehicle traffic on all sides.

Each of the batteries was responsible for security in all directions. Although well-equipped and trained to perform this mission, it was difficult to man 360-degree security while also processing fire missions 24 hours a day. As the battle raged on, the battalion implemented the firebase concept to economize the security effort and better contend with displaced personnel and EPWs.

On the afternoon of 24 March (35 hours after the attack began), the battalion received its first artillery ammunition resupply of 120 high-explosive (HE) and 100 DPICM rounds per battery. 1/10 had had a significant shortage of HE and had been forced to fire rocket-assisted projectiles (RAP) in the rocket-off mode with Charge Three green bag in lieu of HE.

Just as the ammunition resupply arrived, the remainder of 1/11 arrived to provide forward passage of line (FPOL) and reinforcing fires. The decision had been made to pass RCT-1 through the city north toward Al Kut on Highway 7. The FPOL took a number of hours, and 1/11 supported the passage with reinforcing fires until it was ordered to move north of the city. Although 1/11 provided reinforcing fires to RCT-2 and

fires for the FPOL of RCT-1, 1/11 remained in direct support (DS) of RCT-1 and never officially assumed the role of reinforcing (R) to 1/10.

Deploying with 1/11 was Battery G from the 6th Parachute Brigade (UK), an M118 (105-mm) battery with an Arthur radar. This brought the total number of Coalition howitzers trained on Nasiriyah to 42. 1/10 remained the controlling fire direction center (FDC) for all artillery fires in Nasiriyah.

Through the night of the 24th of March, RCT-1 attacked north along Highway 7 to continue the fight toward Al Kut with 1/11 following in support. Battery G remained with 1/10 until first light on 25 March before returning to its unit to prepare for action in Basrah. Battery G and 1/11 expended more than 200 rounds during the night in support of RCT-2's and RCT-1's FPOL.

The fight for Nasiriyah continued with ferocity on the 25th as numerous fire missions were processed during the morning. In a raging windstorm, an enemy T-55 tank dug in to the east of Highway 7 attempted to ambush a 2/8 combined anti-armor team (CAAT) patrol. The wind and dust prevented 2/8 from engaging the enemy tank by anti-tank missile (TOW) or air support, so the patrol initiated a FFE mission to destroy the dug-in tank. Battery C rose to the challenge and destroyed the tank using DPICM.

In the most demanding combat conditions, the artillery once again proved to be the *only* all-weather continuous fire support asset for TF Tarawa.

As if the enemy had been reinvigorated by the sandstorm and heavy overnight rains, on 26 March the urban battle increased in intensity and lethality and proved to be the most prolific day of artillery firing in the battle for An Nasiriyah. Around noon on the 26th, the battalion fired suppressive HE rounds with concrete-piercing fuzes into a hospital that was serving as a paramilitary



B-1/10 firing in support of infantry companies that were in contact near An Nasiriyah.

strongpoint. This fire enabled 2/8 to seize the building.

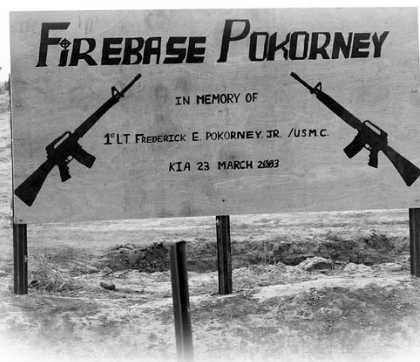
Throughout the battle, aerial reconnaissance reported a number of mortar and artillery pieces in a garrison gun park.

The Iraqi regular forces gave the impression they were capitulating, having staged their equipment in accordance with terms of surrender. By 26 March it was clear the Iraqi paramilitary forces and regular army elements were firing the “surrendered” weapon systems and then quickly vacating the positions and hiding until they wanted to fire another mission.

With unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) now on station, TF Tarawa provided accurate, real-time targeting of many of the staged weapon systems. Receiving fire missions from the UAVs and aerial forward observers (FOs) via the RCT-2 fire support coordination center (FSCC), 1/10 prosecuted more than 15 fire missions on the afternoon of the 26th, destroying two Type 59-1 batteries and three D-30 batteries.

As RCT-2 fought in the streets and within neighborhoods of Nasiriyah, CBR continued to detect enemy indirect fire originating from the vicinity of a railroad station in the southern portion of the city. Both US Army Special Forces and human intelligence (HUMINT) sources verified the target as a paramilitary assembly area containing an estimated 1,000 irregular forces. Adding this information to the many radar-detected targets originating from the same location seemed to confirm the validity of the target. The final corroboration came in the form of a report by an element of the 2d Radio Battalion (RADBN) indicating not only that the assembly area existed, but also that the enemy numbered up to 2,000 and was preparing to launch a counterattack. The fire mission, a battalion-10 rounds of DPICM, yielded an estimated 200 enemy dead and broke up the coordinated enemy counterattack. Referring to this mission, the commanding general of TF Tarawa credited the artillery with being instrumental in breaking the back of the enemy defending Nasiriyah.

The morning of 27 March found 1/10 consolidating defensively into a battalion firebase. The firing position was an oval-shaped position one kilometer in diameter with 42 crew-served weapons and five Avenger anti-air defense vehicles protecting it. The battalion christened the defensive firing position Firebase Pokorney in honor of First



Lieutenant Fred E. Pokorney, Jr., a forward observer from 1/10 killed in action on 23 March while calling in artillery fires on the enemy just north of the Saddam Canal.

Throughout the morning, the battalion processed sporadic fire missions and conducted security and reconnaissance patrols around the firebase. Having reached a crescendo on 26 March, the number of missions and enemy forces being engaged was reduced significantly for the remainder of the month.

On 28 March, RCT-2 directed 1/10 to form a task force to reinforce and secure the Highway 1 bridge over the Euphrates River. The mission was important as Highway 1 was the main supply route for I MEF forces advancing north to Baghdad. Commanded by the battalion executive officer, TF Rex (for the King of Battle) numbered more than 300 personnel with Bravo Battery forming the core of the task force as its provisional infantry.

During the last three days of March, the battalion fired three counterfire missions and five adjust fire battalion mass missions in support of 2/8's and 3/2's clearing of pockets of resistance throughout the city. Of the counterfire missions, one resulted in the destruction of a Type 59-1 battery actively firing on 2/8.

On 1 April, Army Special Forces conducted a raid to recover PFC Jessica Lynch, a member of the US Army's 507th Maintenance Company convoy ambushed on 23 March. Battery C fired deception fires in support of the mission, destroying a suspected enemy command post and arms cache as a diversion for the Special Forces. This mission was the last fired by 1/10 in the Battle for Nasiriyah.

During the next three weeks, RCT-2 expanded its battlespace north along Highways 1 and 7. Moving from city to city in search of pockets of resistance and protecting 1st Marine Division's LOC (the MEF's main effort), the battalion traveled more than 700 kilometers.

The combat highlight of this period occurred when RCT-2 was ordered to force the capitulation of the 10th Armored Division in southeast Iraq near Al Amarah. As 1/10 deployed in front of the mechanized battalion but in trace of a LAR company, RCT-2 conducted a movement-to-contact east of Qalat Sakar toward Al Amarah, a maneuver that caused the 10th Division to capitulate.

Returning to An Nasiriyah as RCT-2 began setting the conditions for Phase IV of OIF, 1/10 organized and operated as provisional infantry from 23 April until 12 May. 1/10 established traffic control points, secured a petroleum distribution facility and provided point security of the Highway 1 bridge.

1/10 then began to retrograde by infiltration back to Kuwait for redeployment by amphibious ships, with the last elements departing An Nasiriyah on 12 May.

Lessons Learned. 1/10 identified a number of lessons learned during OIF and has submitted an official compilation in Marine Corps lessons learned (MCLLS) format. The following are a few of the lessons specific to an artillery-supported MOUT battle and applicable to all towed artillery units.

Towed Artillery Keeping Up with Mechanized Infantry. Considering the speed and mobility of the modern main battle tank and armored personnel carriers, some doubted towed artillery's ability to keep pace with mechanized maneuver elements. In the June 2003 *Marine Corps Gazette*, Lieutenant Colonel Clark wrote, "In today's fast paced, fluid maneuver environment, a towed [artillery] system is simply unrealistic."¹ This was clearly refuted during RCT-2's movement over most of central and eastern Iraq; towed artillery proved more than capable of providing accurate, timely fire support in movement-to-contacts that often exceeded 100 kilometers.

Although the M1A1 tank and AAV have greater rates of march over unimproved surfaces than a towed artillery piece, they had to allow their resupply vehicles to keep pace with them. The logistics vehicles necessary to sustain mechanized forces are wheeled, like that of a howitzer prime mover. Although there are logistic variants of the tank and AAV, they can't serve as a stand-alone combat service support (CSS) element for their respective units over a sustained period of time.

Tanks and AAVs need dedicated CSS elements to provide replenishment, replacement, refitting and refueling of the bulk supplies associated with mechanized forces. Planning considerations and movement rates are tempered to accommodate sustaining the force logistically.

Also, the debilitating effects of moving wheeled systems great distances in a very hot climate, even over roads with improved surfaces, caused RCT-2's rate

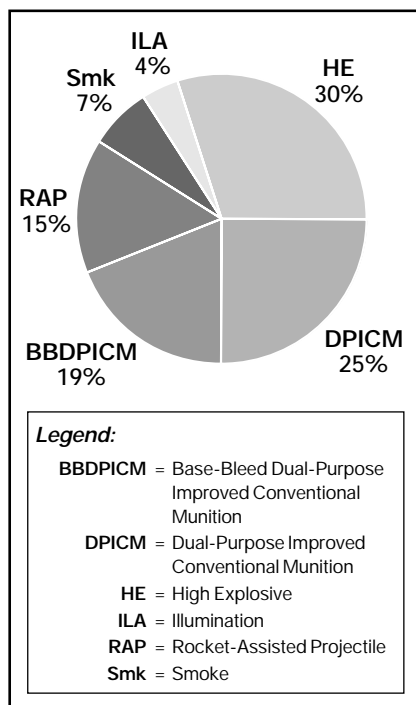


Figure 2: 1/10 OIF Ammo Issued. *Marine Corps Order 8010.1E Class V(W) Planning Factors for Fleet Marine Force Combat Operations* shows the percentages of artillery ammunition 1/10 was issued prior to going into An Nasiriyah, the "go to war ammo."

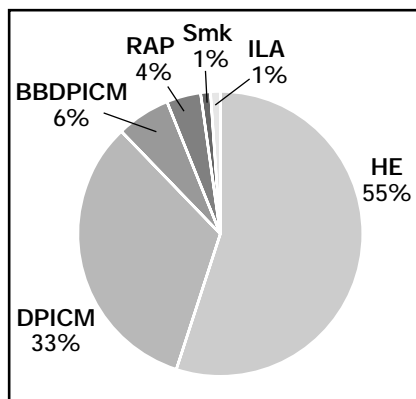


Figure 3: 1/10 OIF Ammo Expended. This chart reflects the percentages of artillery ammunition 1/10 actually expended during OIF, 99% of which was fired during the battle of An Nasiriyah from 23 to 29 March.

of march rarely to exceed 25 kilometers per hour.

1/10's experience in OIF illustrated that, in spite of the inherent raw speed of mechanized vehicles, towed artillery is more than capable of keeping up with mechanized forces.

Artillery Ammunition Apportionment in an Urban Fight. RCT-2's battle in An Nasiriyah was, for the most part, an MOUT fight. Before departing Camp Shoup on 20 March, the initial issue of artillery ammunition was based on a combat planning factor of a composite enemy threat (armor and infantry) and included a much greater mix of "long shooters" than HE munitions—RAP and base bleed DPICM (BBDPICM).

Would a different mix of ammunition have been requested if an urban fight were anticipated? Yes, but based on what planning factor? The primary source for ammunition planning, *Marine Corps Order (MCO) 8010.1E Class V(W) Planning Factors for Fleet Marine Force Combat Operations*, depicts ammunition allocations based on enemy composition (armor- or infantry-specific or a composite of each) rather than terrain, such as the urban environment of An Nasiriyah.

Figure 2 depicts the artillery ammunition 1/10 was issued before going into An Nasiriyah—the battalion's "go to war ammo." This allocation equaled one combat load (CL) and one day of ammunition (DOA) at the assault rate, based on a conventional composite threat.

Figure 3 shows the percentages of ammo that 1/10 actually expended during OIF, 99 percent of which was fired during the battle in An Nasiriyah from 23 to 29 March. 1/10 fired primarily HE in urban operations.

The ammunition allocation percentages derived from the battle of An Nasiriyah could serve as a basis to initiate a planning template for future artillery MOUT engagements.

Resurrection of the Firebase. It was apparent in An Nasiriyah that the non-contiguous nature of the battlefield, namely the battalion's exposure on all sides, would necessitate economizing the local security effort of each battery. Based on a prevailing enemy threat consisting of paramilitary forces with limited indirect fire capability and no air assets, the battalion consolidated into a firebase.

A firebase is defined as an area in hostile territory that requires a 360-degree defense and supports combat patrols or larger operations with com-

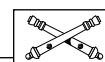
bat support and CSS assets.² Due to the ground threat, wide dispersion of the batteries was traded for berming and hardening. Fighting positions with overhead cover for crew-served weapons were prepared, exterior and interior berms created and the interior LOCs maximized by wiring-in every element.

During the Battle for An Nasiriyah, the Marines of 1/10 (Reinforced) distinguished themselves by providing continuous fire support to RCT-2 forces. Through driving sandstorms and torrential rains, artillery repeatedly affirmed itself as an all-weather, long-range fire support capability. Artillery fire effectively destroyed the enemy's major indirect fire assets and his ability to influence the battle.

In only eight days of fighting, the battalion processed 112 fire missions while expending more than 2,100 rounds. Counterbattery radar was invaluable to maneuver commanders as "Red Rain" (radar missions) accounted for 30 percent of all fire missions. 1/10 was credited with having broken the enemy's back in the Battle for An Nasiriyah—maneuver endorsement of the effectiveness of Marine artillery in an urban environment

Endnotes:

1. Lieutenant Colonel J.E. Clark, "What is the Future of Field Artillery in the Expeditionary Warfare Environment?" *Marine Corps Gazette*, 86, No. 6 (June 2003), 14.
2. *Field Manual 101-5 Operational Terms and Graphics* Marine Corps Reference Publication No. MCRP 5-2A (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the United States Marine Corps, 30 September 1997).



Major Walker M. Field, USMC, was the Commanding Officer of Headquarters Battery in 1st Battalion, 10th Marines (1/10) during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Battle of An Nasiriyah. Currently, he is the Operations Officer for 1/10. In other positions with the battalion, he served as the Battalion S4 and the Commanding Officer of B Battery. He also served with 1/12 in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, as Assistant S3, Battalion Fire Direction Officer (FDO), C Battery FDO, Liaison Officer and Forward Observer. He spent three years in his Secondary Military Occupational Specialty as the Fiscal Officer for the Intermediate Supply Support Activity (ISSA) and Deputy Comptroller, both with the 2d Force Service Support Group (FSST) at Camp Lejuene, North Carolina. He holds an MBA from Campbell University in North Carolina, and, among other schools, is a graduate of the Marine Corps Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, Virginia.